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ABSTRACT

It is generally believed that there are too few Canadian faculty members to meet adequately the needs generated by recent increases in enrollment and by expanding societal expectations for college research and development, technology transfer, and community service. A very large cohort of faculty members will be retiring around the turn of the century, and personnel required to replace them are not pursuing graduate studies in sufficient numbers. Assuming the validity of these projections, the paper identifies opportunities and dangers that the projections present and then suggests responses. Opportunities include: undertaking major curricular adjustments, redistributing resources among the major functions performed by higher education, and meeting ambitious employment equity targets. Dangers include: failing to have the necessary plans in place; making part-time and limited-term appointments, as quick but unsatisfactory responses to emerging needs; and failing to respond to fast-moving recruitment opportunities due to a tradition of time-consuming, highly participative approaches to reaching appointment decisions. While "front-line" administrators must serve as the pilots, senior central administrators must play an institutional course-setting role. Several strategies are offered for consideration in solving these problems. (JDD)

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PREPARING FOR THE NEW PARADIGM

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PREPARING FOR THE NEW PARADIGM

I have been asked to prepare this brief paper as a stimulus for discussion of matters concerning Canada's "academic labour market" to which our universities' executive heads must give serious, immediate, and personal attention. The title was provided by the Conference planners and, given the imprecise definition of "paradigm", I had a great deal of flexibility in choice of subject; thus, what follows is based largely on personal observation, experience, and conviction. I understand the primary purpose to be the highlighting of relevant issues rather than the promulgation of promising resolutions, with a hope that some progress toward the latter may emerge from our deliberations on the former.

The conditions giving rise to concerns about the "academic labour market" are well known because they have been widely publicised: it is generally believed that we currently have too few faculty members to adequately meet the needs generated by dramatic recent increases in enrolment and by expanding societal expectations for our research and development, technology transfer, and community service; because of the tremendous expansion we underwent in the 1960's, we can anticipate losing a very large cohort of faculty members through retirement around the turn of the century; the personnel required to replace these retirees, who should now be pursuing their studies in our graduate schools, are not there in sufficient numbers; and the opportunities to recruit them from other sources are not promising because the perceived conditions of work and available resources at our universities render us ill-equipped to compete for highly qualified academic talent with external private and public sector employers or universities in other countries where similar problems are anticipated. While some scepticism about such "labour market" projections may be justified on the basis of their predictive failures in the past, it must be acknowledged that there have been some improvements in our techniques of projection and it would probably be extremely unwise to ignore them. Accordingly, for the purpose of this paper I shall assume that they have some validity and I'll attempt to identify certain opportunities and dangers that they present and to suggest a few responses we might consider for illustrative purposes.

Opportunities

The prospect of having to replace a comparatively large number of retirees with a substantial new cohort of faculty members presents us with some unusual opportunities to re-orient what we do, how we do it, and who does it (subject, of course, to the necessary resources being available and the dangers outlined below being avoided). If we wish, for example, to undertake major curricular adjustments (e.g., toward broader undergraduate

education, more multi-disciplinary programs, updated and better integrated graduate offerings, increased co-operation with external agencies in the presentation of learning experiences, introduction of emerging new fields of study, etc.), now is the time to plan such revisions because the opportunity to recruit sufficient new faculty members capable of implementing them is about to present itself and will soon pass us by if we are unprepared to capture it. If we wish to effect some redistribution of our capacity and resources among the major functions that we perform (e.g., toward increased entrepreneurial activity, enhanced efforts in international development or community service (including continuing education), extended applications of technology, joint ventures and development corporations, expanded emphasis on graduate studies and research, etc.), we must plan now for such adjustments so that the impending chance to recruit new faculty capable of implementing them will not be lost. If we wish to meet ambitious employment equity targets (through significant growth in the proportions of women, visible minorities, and disabled persons among our faculty), the procedures and criteria to do so must be put in place now so that they can be applied in making the relatively large number of new appointments that we anticipate over the next few years because another such opportunity to do so is unlikely to become available in the foreseeable future beyond that.

There are undoubtedly other opportunities to make substantial changes in the functions of Canadian universities that could be envisioned, but the above are adequate to illustrate the main point that we must get our act together immediately. The upcoming chances to make fundamental improvements are unprecedented since the 1960's, they are unlikely to recur for another quarter-century or so (if then), and we can ill afford to be "caught with our plans down" during the window that seems likely to open for us in this decade.

Dangers

In the hope of exploiting these opportunities, however, there are various dangers that must be clearly recognized and evaded if at all possible. The obvious general ones, of course, are that we may fail to have the necessary plans in place (or our plans may be faulty due to reliance on rumoured need or employers' impressions), and that we will have inadequate resources to implement them in any case; some considerations for addressing the former are outlined above and a few suggestions concerning the latter are included in the following section.

But there are also some more particular dangers that must be foreseen. For example, while part-time and limited-term

appointments can facilitate quick responses to emerging needs, these are unsatisfactory approaches to achieving lasting improvements and, as responses, they are unequally available among institutions (depending on their locations) and variably applicable within institutions (depending on their programs). There is also the danger that our replacement activities will be concentrated within a period of very few years rather than distributively "flowed" according to a more stable replacement plan across a couple of decades, which would cause a recurrence of the 60's-generated problem we now face some thirty years hence. There is the danger that we will take the easy route of replacing retirees by people with like specializations rather than reconceptualizing existing disciplines and anticipating new social and student demands in our appointments.

In addition, there is the danger that our tradition of extensive collegial involvement, highly participative procedures, and cumbersome and time-consuming approaches to reaching appointment decisions (including the occasional vexations of "two-tier advertising" and faculty "unionism") may cause severe practical difficulties in responding to fast-moving market developments and recruitment opportunities. Another danger is that we will be forced to compromise on quality criteria in making our appointments because of an inability to compete effectively in what will likely become a "seller's market"; with highly qualified new Ph.D.'s projected to become a scarce resource and large numbers of faculty vacancies anticipated virtually worldwide, the salaries and working conditions that Canadian universities can provide may simply not compare with those available in the better American universities and various other public and private sector employers that will be recruiting in the same limited market. And there is the danger that the above dangers will frighten us out of the game and that the complex changes inherent in pursuing the opportunities mentioned previously will intimidate us to the point where we lack the political will or conceptual ability to go for it.

It is unnecessary to continue this litany of dangers in order to make the point that tremendous courage, determination, and intelligence will be required if we are to guide our institutions successfully through the dangers that lie in our path toward the opportunities for fundamental improvements which we have a chance of enjoying. And while we must rely largely on our "front-line" administrators (especially Deans) to serve as the pilots, we as senior central administrators must play an institutional course-setting role because many of the challenges are university-wide in nature.

Suggestions

While it is not the purpose of this paper to provide solutions to the problems that have been identified, there are some strategies that commend themselves immediately for consideration, a few illustrations of which are outlined below as possible "discussion starters" (beyond the various scholarship and fellowship programs that have already been launched by organizations such as NSERC, which has proven itself particularly cognizant of the possible crisis). For example, in random order:

- We might try to improve our "productivity rate" of Ph.D.'s by seeking to reduce the number of years typically required to complete the degree and bringing down the level of attrition in our graduate programs.

- We might try to "smooth out" our flow of replacements by supplementing the early retirement programs that are now common with more attention to extended appointments beyond normal retirement age through incentives offered to the best of our senior professors (the argument that the latter must be let go because we can "buy" two young professors for each salary thus recovered has become less convincing as the growing "seller's market" is already causing us to far exceed salary minima in many recent recruitment efforts).

- We might try to recover the erstwhile qualitative distinction between honours and regular (or pass) undergraduate programs in order to enhance the academic orientation (and scholarly career interests) of honours graduates.

- We might try to improve the working conditions of faculty members by enhancing the infrastructural attractions of physical facilities, workload flexibility, library acquisitions, laboratory equipment, support staff and services, etc.

- We might try much more actively to "market" the professoriate among first- and second-year undergraduates in order to compete effectively with other prospective employer groups; such efforts could include attention to the ability of certain current professors to serve as role models (e.g., by assigning our best faculty members to teach introductory courses, by involving them as well in school liaison activities and television teaching, and by engaging them in other impressive ways that are highly visible to the general public); further, we might pursue such targeted

recruitment approaches as the one recently initiated by the Dean of Engineering at Carleton University, whereby faculty members are encouraged to identify senior undergraduates of exceptional promise (especially women) and, where suitable openings exist and the candidates are deemed to be excellent prospective faculty members, offering them two-year term positions as Instructors during which time their potential would be assessed and, if it is high and regular faculty openings are anticipated in the medium-term future, they would be offered subsidies for graduate studies at other universities in the expectation that they would return thereafter to Carleton as faculty members.

- We might, perhaps collectively, launch much more aggressive efforts to recruit into our graduate programs the academically most talented students in other countries (including the U.S., France, the U.K., and other leading industrialized nations) with the intent of "grooming" them for faculty positions here.

- We might reallocate resources to graduate student support, not only through increased financial aid but also through providing designated and distinctive residences, fostering the activities of graduate students' associations, and encouraging "mentoring" relationships with them by outstanding faculty members (including active and supportive supervision of teaching assistants as "apprentices").

- We might try to engage aggressively in "corporate raiding" to attract onto our campuses outstanding scholars and Canadian students in other countries as well as mid-career Ph.D.'s in other sectors, by emphasizing the relative advantages of working conditions in Canadian universities -- over those in other public and private sector organizations (such as proximity to a broader range of colleagues, the wider variety of duties available, the "youthful" milieu etc.) and over universities in several other countries (such as the comparatively high degree of autonomy that our institutions enjoy).

Numerous other illustrative strategies could be suggested, but the above should suffice as stimulants to our deliberations (if any are needed). As a concluding generalization, it should be noted that, while the approaches we take will require good management by executive heads and their administrative colleagues, success will depend as well on the active and committed involvement of individual faculty members; one can hope

that this will be forthcoming, because it is the advancement of their own profession that is at stake.

Finally, it cannot be overlooked that, although insufficient in itself, increased financial support is necessary to achieving the results that are required; more funding will definitely be needed if we are to exploit the opportunities and evade the dangers identified above. But if governments are to be persuaded to invest more in us and to allow us more "room" on tuition fees, they will likely have to be convinced that we have worthy and realistic strategic plans in place for the disposition of these resources. This means that they ought to be consulted in the development of our plans and they must be convinced that we are capable of pulling them off and that meaningful improvements which are realistic will result. They are unlikely to reach this conclusion as long as we limit our public statements about universities to comments on how awful they are and how much worse they are likely to become. We must stop shooting ourselves in the feet verbally by bad-mouthing our conditions and prospects (at least publicly), or threatening dire consequences on which our governments know (and the general populace suspects) we can't or won't deliver. And we must start generating some hope and confidence by providing the positive reasons for investing in our future.

Further, because our needs are immediate, we've got to get on with it right away.